

TESTIMONY OF  
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VICE PRESIDENT, ENGINEERING  
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the Postal Service's planned reentry into the Curseen-Morris Processing and Distribution Center here in Washington, DC. With me is Jerry Lane, manager, Capital Metro Operations.

Throughout the entire two-year process leading to the reclamation of this facility, our primary commitment has been the safety of our employees and those we serve. A key element of that commitment has been ongoing communications with employees, the community and public officials at all levels, as we shared our plans, reported on our progress and sought input and suggestions.

I believe today's hearing is a reflection of your commitment – both as individuals and as a Committee – to the cooperative process that will return this facility to safe and productive use for our employees and for the Brentwood community.

Working together, we have achieved our goal – the successful decontamination of the Curseen-Morris facility. While we are pleased that we have come this far, we cannot forget the awful events that set this process in motion. Two of our employees, Joseph P. Curseen Jr. and Thomas L. Morris Jr., tragically lost their lives simply by doing what they had done for so many years – coming to work to make sure the mail got through. Too many others – employees and those we serve – suffered terribly when they became infected with anthrax.

All of our efforts over the last two years have been anchored by our knowledge of the tremendous individual and human costs of the bioterrorist attacks of 2001. As we move forward, those individuals will never be far from our minds.

It is fitting, as well, to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of every employee of the Brentwood Road facility – and all Washington, DC, postal employees – in the days and weeks following the attacks. Despite their understandable anxiety and fear, they continued to do their best, providing uninterrupted service to the hundreds of thousands of families, businesses and government agencies that depend on the mail. We are grateful for the cooperation and understanding of our employees as we worked together through this challenging and difficult period. I cannot say it more simply or sincerely than this: our employees are second to none.

That is why the planning, processes and technologies we relied upon to decontaminate the Curseen-Morris facility could only be the best. This was the largest biohazard decontamination ever undertaken. It had to be done right.

Fortunately, the experience in fumigating the Hart Senate Office Building, contaminated by one of the same letters that contaminated the Brentwood Road processing plant, served as a guide. We learned, through the Hart experience, that chlorine dioxide, commonly used in water treatment and food sanitization, was effective in neutralizing anthrax spores. We knew that it could be used, in the proper concentrations and under the right environmental conditions, to decontaminate large interior spaces.

Yet the uniqueness and complexity of applying this technology to the Brentwood Road facility presented challenges. The decontamination area of the Curseen-Morris facility is 17 million cubic feet, compared to only 100,000 cubic feet in the Hart Building. Curseen-Morris is primarily one huge large, open workspace. The Hart Building is a more traditional business environment, consisting of individual office suites spread over several floors.

It became apparent, very quickly, that we would be writing the book on this subject – on a grand scale. But, I might add, we had a great deal of expert help with its authorship. We could not have been successful without the help of specialists from the military, government and the private sector.

The Postal Service was just one part of a team that included the Armed Forces Radiobiological Research Institute, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the District of Columbia Department of Health, the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Their expertise and knowledge helped us to create and implement a decontamination plan that would not only be effective, but would protect the health and safety of our employees, our contractors and residents and business people in the Brentwood neighborhood.

Our contractors, Ashland, Inc., Sabre Oxidation Technologies and Shaw E&I, brought us the benefit of invaluable years of experience in areas that lent themselves to adaptation, expansion and integration at the Brentwood location.

And a number of Postal Service employees, represented so well by Dennis Baca, our manager of Environmental Policy, and John Bridges, who served as on-site incident commander during the entire decontamination process, showed themselves to be infinitely resourceful, knowledgeable and, quite literally, tireless.

Of course, this story could have been very different without the generous help of Congress and the Administration by making \$762 million available to the Postal Service to respond to the anthrax attacks and develop and implement technologies to protect against similar, future incidents.

We are grateful for the assistance and cooperation of so many who shared our goal of eradicating the anthrax threat at the Curseen-Morris facility and returning it to active use to serve Washington, DC, without risk to our employees or to our customers.

The process of reclaiming the Curseen-Morris facility actually began on October 21, 2001, when it was closed. From an operational standpoint, we had to consider how – and even if – we could reclaim the facility. We also had to determine how we would deliver the more than 1 million pieces of mail that remained in the plant.

While these were important issues, our primary concern was the health and safety of our employees. That is why we closed the facility as soon as public health officials understood the nature and extent of the risk. And that is why we cooperated fully with medical professionals in their efforts to provide information and medical prophylaxis to employees with potential anthrax exposure.

We had three choices regarding disposition of the Brentwood facility. We could close it permanently and demolish it. We could attempt to sell it. Or we could work to reclaim it. But, frankly, each of these options required complete decontamination of the building. Whatever the building's ultimate fate, the Postal Service would not allow it to present an open-ended risk to the community.

Our decision was to return the facility to active use as a mail-processing center. With a daily mail volume of more than three million pieces, the nation's capital and its service needs support the continuation of a modern, efficient processing and distribution center in Washington, DC.

The second operational issue we faced was the delivery of the mail still inside the facility. We worked quickly to establish a contract for the irradiation of this mail at a site in Ohio. A second location was later established in New Jersey. The mail was removed from the facility by trained, contract employees wearing protective equipment. It was then packaged and trucked to the off site locations for treatment and only then was it returned to the mailstream for delivery. To this day, the New Jersey facility continues to irradiate mail destined for Congress, the White House and federal government offices within the District of Columbia.

Once the mail was removed from the building we could begin to implement the decontamination plan we had developed in the first weeks following the incident. This involved completely sealing the building. Every opening presented the potential of aerosolized anthrax spores escaping from the building. This included every exterior door and window, skylights, the HVAC system, all utility conduits, expansion joints, and every crack and crevice.

Qualified contractors began cleaning known, contaminated surface areas in the building – mail processing equipment, counters, sorting cases, furniture, kitchen equipment, rolling stock and floors. Ultimately, we sanitized decontaminated some 150,000 items. We could then begin to remove some of it from the building to make room for the equipment used during the decontamination fumigation process itself.

As I mentioned, this was the largest undertaking of its kind. It required construction of an on-site chemical factory to manufacture the chlorine dioxide gas that would be used for the fumigation. To assure the safest process possible, the components of the gas were delivered to the site individually and were mixed together only when it was necessary for tests or the actual fumigation.

Pumping and mixing stations were constructed. Huge Large gas-distribution pipelines connected them to the facility so that the chlorine dioxide and the necessary water vapor could be pumped into the building. Smaller pipes snaked throughout the interior to ensure that the chlorine dioxide and water vapor were evenly distributed. Scrubbers were constructed to neutralize and remove the chlorine dioxide from the building following fumigation. These waste products would be disposed of in accordance with applicable environmental regulations.

Every system used in support of fumigation was redundant. If a primary system failed, a back-up system was prepared to take over. Electric generators were on site in the event of a power failure during critical recovery operations.

Communication – with postal employees and with members of the Brentwood community – was equally important. The anthrax attacks and the clean-up efforts were situations never before experienced. There were understandable concerns. It was necessary that we understood and responded to those concerns as we developed our plans.

As I said earlier, we were writing the book. We could not take the risk that we had failed to ask ourselves a key question or that, if we did, somebody else might have a better answer. So, prior to every critical step of the process, Capital Metro Operations Manager Jerry Lane arranged for community and employee town hall meetings. The participation of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, Mayor Anthony Williams and Ward 5 Council Member Vincent Orange was a large part of their success.

We worked closely with public officials, the media, our unions, and our employees to make sure every key stakeholder had current and accurate information about our progress. Understanding that not everyone could attend scheduled meetings, we also established a toll-free hot line to provide information and respond directly to questions and concerns.

And we tested every element of our gas manufacturing and delivery system to ensure that it operated properly. We tested the scrubber system to make sure it could remove the gases pumped into the building and break them down into harmless salts and water.

Safety was our watchword during every step of the process. Only trained, authorized personnel were permitted to enter the Brentwood property beyond the fence line. Our

goal was to do it right, not quickly. And we worked to provide the appropriate level of oversight for our efforts.

To that end, an independent Environmental Clearance Committee was established in July 2002. Its role was to provide an independent evaluation of the clean-up and testing efforts we were undertaking at the Curseen-Morris Processing and Distribution Center. The Committee, not the Postal Service, would determine if our decontamination efforts were successful and if we could ultimately reoccupy the building.

Environmental Clearance Committee membership includes representatives of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of the District of Columbia, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Army Center for Health Protection and Preventive Medicine, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, the District of Columbia Department of Health, the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute, and the University of Minnesota School of Public Health.

By mid-December 2002, all systems were ready. The Environmental Protection Agency had cleared our final legal hurdle by issuing a crisis exemption permitting the use of chlorine dioxide for this special purpose of fumigating the Brentwood Road plant.

On December 14, 2002, we began. The first steps were to bring the internal temperature of the building to 75° Fahrenheit while achieving a relative humidity level of 75% – and holding both at those levels. This environment was necessary to rehydrate the dry anthrax spores so they would be receptive to the neutralizing ability of the chlorine dioxide gas. When these conditions were achieved, chlorine dioxide was pumped into the building until a concentration of 750 parts per million was achieved. This was sustained for 12 hours. The process was monitored by closed circuit television cameras located strategically throughout the building.

More than 6,000 surrogate spore strips had been placed throughout the facility beforehand to determine the effectiveness of the treatment. Following completion of the fumigation on December 15, contractors reentered the building to begin gathering the spore strips and to take additional surface samples and air samples. The air sampling involved disturbing surfaces with fans and blowers while the samples were taken.

The results confirmed that the fumigation process was successful. We used more than 6,000 surrogate spore strips to ensure that the chlorine dioxide permeated the facility. One hundred percent of the 4,428 surface samples and 601 aggressive air samples – using fans and blowers to disturb surfaces – showed no growth. Renovation of the facility could begin.

By February 26, 2003, the members of the Environmental Clearance Committee were able to enter the building without the need for personal protective equipment. In an interim statement on March 10, 2003, the Committee agreed that “the fumigation of the Curseen-Morris facility met the criterion that the U.S. Postal Service and the District of Columbia established for a successful fumigation effort.” On May 30, 2003 the Committee issued a letter noting that “the results of approximately 2,400 additional samples collected during renovation work were also found to be negative for *Bacillus anthracis* spores.” The Committee concluded that fumigation was successful.

With that finding, restoration work was transferred from our Engineering group, which had responsibility for decontamination, to our Facilities group, which normally handles renovation of postal facilities.

The restoration is now nearing completion. More than 600 tons of debris have been removed. The entire facility has been cleaned and painted. The medical unit has been replaced. Restrooms have been rebuilt. Electrical and telecommunications wiring has been replaced. Cafeteria kitchen equipment has been renovated. Automated mail processing equipment has been refurbished and rebuilt. Ceiling tiles have been replaced. New employee lockers have been installed. Metal corroded from exposure to



high humidity and chlorine dioxide gas has been restored and painted. Safety and emergency systems have been repaired, modernized and, in some cases, replaced. The parking lot has been refurbished. The heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system has been upgraded. Retail and office areas have been modernized.

The obsolete sack-sorting system has been removed, freeing much-needed floor space for modern, automated mail processing equipment.

And, significantly, Delivery Bar Code Sorter #17, the most contaminated spot in the facility, no longer exists. It was dismantled, removed from the site and shredded.

We are extremely mindful of the need to provide a safe and healthful working environment for the protection of our employees and our contractors working to restore and renovate the facility. A full-time safety professional has been assigned to the Curseen-Morris facility, with responsibility for multiple, daily site-safety inspections and addressing day-to-day safety issues. Other duties include development and implementation of safety protocols and documentation, management of visitor safety, and serving as liaison with the safety staff of the contractors involved in the renovation, with OSHA, with the Postal Inspection Service and with other Postal Service safety professionals.

Throughout the entire restoration process, in conjunction with the OSHA, we have implemented an aggressive post-fumigation, transitional sampling program. General and targeted sampling has been taking place on a daily basis. Given the magnitude of these efforts, it was critical that we sampled thoroughly throughout the building and, in particular, in the many areas that were disturbed by construction.

To date, more than 1,000 wet-wipe surface samples have been taken. Dry-filter units located throughout the building have been sampling air in and adjacent to construction areas. Sampling also includes the use of vacuums with High Efficiency Particulate Air

filters. Each and every sample has tested negative for anthrax. And test results are made available to employees on a daily basis.

We will continue with testing even after operations resume at the facility. This will involve air-sampling in mail-processing areas using a sophisticated Polymerase Chain Reaction or PCR-based sampling system. The system will provide rapid, on-site DNA analysis of the sample. If the analysis reveals the presence of *Bacillus anthracis*, the building will be evacuated immediately and local health and public safety officials will respond and quickly take the actions they deem necessary to protect employees and others who may have been exposed.

As I mentioned, earlier, mail for delivery to federal government offices in the District of Columbia continues to be irradiated at a contractor site in New Jersey prior to local delivery. Last week we announced our proposal to locate a mail-irradiation facility here in Washington, DC.

The preferred site is located on Postal Service property at the Curseen-Morris Processing and Distribution Center. The first step in this process is our publication of a "Notice of Intent" to begin the Environmental Assessment process that will help determine the feasibility of our proposal. Construction of a local, Postal Service-owned irradiation facility would reduce costs, improve delivery time and minimize logistic and security requirements. We will work closely with the community and its elected representatives as we develop this proposal.

And, I am pleased to report, on September 19, the Environmental Clearance Committee provided the Postal Service with a reoccupancy recommendation.

The ECC concluded that "a science-based process has allowed a determination that the remediation was successful, that rigorous sampling was unable to find any residual viable spores, that workers can safely return, and that normal service to the public can safely resume."

We welcome this finding. And we are pleased that the restoration efforts undertaken this year mean that our employees will be returning to a workplace that has been almost completely renovated. We have worked closely with employees and their union and management association representatives to prepare for planned reentry. Professional counselors from our Employee Assistance Program have been and are available to all employees as needed. We continue to provide updates about our progress in restoring the building.

We have been working closely with our employees and their union representatives as we plan our re-entry to the Curseen-Morris facility. Jerry Lane will tell you more about these efforts.

Mr. Chairman, the events of the fall of 2001 were unprecedented. For that reason, they were virtually unimaginable. The Postal Service, our employees and the nation were shaken. As an organization, we suffered a terrible loss. Yet the men and women of the Postal Service continued on their rounds, serving America, undeterred.

As we prepare to restore operations to the Curseen-Morris Processing and Distribution Center, our memory of those days informs all that we do. Yes, the world changed for the Postal Service. Fortunately, it continues to change. The state of knowledge about biohazards and, specifically, anthrax, has grown tremendously. The medical community's ability to respond has advanced dramatically. Advanced technology that offers detection and early warning, unavailable two years ago, will soon become commonplace in the Postal Service. And we will continue to explore other technology and process solutions that protect our employees, our customers and the mail.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your time and interest in learning more about our efforts to reenter the Curseen-Morris facility. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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